



University of Groningen

Creation and Cosmogony

van Kooten, G.H.

Published in:
Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2012

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
van Kooten, G. H. (2012). Creation and Cosmogony: III. New Testament. In Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception (pp. 973-976). De Gruyter Mouton.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

tamental period (cf., however, already Prov 8:22–36), where God's spirit or wisdom, now in hypostatized form, becomes a mediating concept. While the Creator himself is beyond the grasp of human understanding and experience, humans can in fact understand and settle in the order of creation, because they can relate to the wisdom that was there when God created the world (Wis 6:12–25; 7:1–8:1; Sir 1:1–30; 6:24–30).

Bibliography: ■ Anderson, B. (ed.), *Creation in the Old Testament* (Minneapolis, Minn. 1985). ■ Berlin, A., "The Wisdom of Creation in Psalm 104," in *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients* (ed. R. Toxel; Winona Lake, Ind. 2005) 71–83. ■ Brown, W. P., *Structure, Role and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1–2:3* (Atlanta, Ga. 1993). ■ Fretheim, T., *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville, Minn. 2005). ■ Jacob, B., *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis* (Jersey City, N.J. 2007). ■ Janowski, B., "Tempel und Schöpfung: Schöpfungstheologische Aspekte der priesterschriftlichen Heiligtumskonzeption," *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 5 (1990) 37–69. ■ Liss, H., "The Imaginary Sanctuary: The Priestly Code as an Example of Fictional Literature in the Hebrew Bible," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (eds. O. Lipschits/M. Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind. 2006) 663–89. ■ Niditch, S., *Chaos to Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation* (Durham, N.C. 1985). ■ Schüle, A., *Der Prolog der Hebräischen Bibel* (Zürich 2006). ■ Steck, O. H., *Der Schöpfungsbericht der Priesterschrift* (Göttingen 1981). ■ Welker, M., *Creation and Reality* (Minneapolis, Minn. 2000).

Andreas K. Schuele

III. New Testament

In the NT writings one can distinguish between (1) the multiple, frequent assertions of God's creatorship which are made briefly without further elaboration, and (2) those which are of a more polemical or (3) metaphysical nature. Although most cosmogonic statements are concerned with the beginning of the cosmos, some also imply (4) the further development and/or end of the cosmos.

1. Simple Assertions about God's Creatorship. God's creatorship is often referred to in terms of "before the beginning of the cosmos" (John 17:24; Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20) or "from the beginning of the cosmos" (Rom 1:20; Mark 10:6; 13:19; Matt 13:35; 24:21; 25:34; Luke 11:50; Heb 4:3; 9:26; Rev 13:8; 17:8; 2 Pet 3:4). This elemental faith is also expressed in prayers (Acts 4:24) and in particular characterizations of God (Eph 3:9; 1 Pet 4:19).

2. Polemical Assertions about God's Creatorship. Apart from these repetitive basic convictions, sometimes there is a need – in particular controversies and debates – to defend God's creatorship in a special way.

First of all, God's creation of the cosmos is contrasted with the man-made fabrication of temples and idols. God's eternal power and divine nature are contrasted with lifeless images in the form of humans or animals (Rom 1:20–23; Acts 14:15; 17:24–25). Secondly, reference to God's creatorship

is made amidst the perplexity of history, against the background of apocalyptic scenarios. The author of Revelation addresses God as follows: "you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (4:11; cf. 5:13; 10:6; 14:7). God is the παντοκράτωρ, the Almighty (Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22). Thirdly, in differing contexts the authors of NT writings draw on different contemporary cosmologies. The author of 2 Peter criticizes Platonizing Christian opponents who believe that the physical cosmos is without end and will not suffer destruction. He draws instead on Stoic terminology to express his belief in the world's eschatology: "the elements will be dissolved with fire" (3:4–7, 10). In this text, Jewish eschatology and Greek physics intermingle. This is no exception in the NT. The author of Colossians draws on Platonic views to elucidate his conviction that the present cosmos is stable and coherent (1:17), whereas the author of Ephesians modifies this view through Stoics emphases that reveal his expectation of dynamic cosmic developments under Christ's influence (Eph 1:10, 23; 4:10). Fourthly, another polemic develops between dualistic and anti-dualistic positions. According to the author of 1 Timothy, "everything created by God is good" (4:4); God "gives life to all things" (6:13).

3. Creation and Metaphysics. The belief in God's creatorship is also expressed in metaphysical language. According to Paul, in good Greek fashion, the existence of the invisible God can be deduced from visible reality (Rom 1:20). Paul also draws on Greek prepositional metaphysics, which characterizes the cosmos' relationship to God through the use of particular prepositions. So Paul states: "for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:6). Or, differently: "from him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom 11:36; cf. further 1 Cor 11:12; Col 1:16–17, 20; Heb 1:2; 2:10). This language is not merely "liturgical," but fully comparable with the Greek metaphysical use of prepositions. Christ's instrumentality in the creation of all things is also expressed through characterizations of Christ as "the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15) and as "the origin of God's creation" (Rev 3:14). Closely related to this is the view that the world was created by the λόγος, as John's prologue states (John 1:3). This view, which is Stoically colored, can also be detected behind 2 Peter: "by the word of God, heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water" (3:5), and in the letter to the Hebrews: "the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible" (11:3; cf. 1:2–3). Metaphorically, this cosmogonic language is also applied

to the rebirth of humankind: "he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (Jas 1:18; cf. 1 Pet 1:23). In John, in parallel with the predominantly Stoic terminology of the λόγος, the author also employs the distinctively Platonic language of the "true light," the source and origin of all physical light (1:9, 11:9; cf. Plato, *Phaed.* 109E).

4. The Cosmogonic Process since Creation. Although most cosmological language in NT writings is properly speaking cosmogonic in the sense that it describes the beginning of the cosmos, this language can also describe the processes that have been developing since creation and are progressing towards a specific end. This is already implied in the prepositional metaphysics described above, according to which creation is not only "from" God or Christ and "through" God or Christ, but also "to" God or Christ. These processes span the beginning, the present, and the end. In this way, they include what is often separately labeled as creationism, on the one hand, and eschatology, on the other. In Paul's writings there is a strong awareness, in a sense parallel to Stoicism, that "the present form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31). The world is growing old, *mundus senescens*. Under Christ's influence, this process will end in a cosmic phase in which God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:24–28). Like particular gods in Platonism, although partly veiled in language drawn from the Psalms (Pss 8; 110) and from the Danielic description of the Son of Man (Dan 7), Christ is accorded the power to subject the chaotic cosmos to himself (Phil 3:21). Or differently phrased, Christ is gathering up all things in him (Eph 1:10) and, in close analogy to Greek views, "filling all things" (Eph 1:23; 4:10). In Acts this cosmogonic-eschatological process is referred to, using a Stoic term, as the "ἀποκατάστασις of all things," the re-constitution of the cosmos (3:21). Otherwise than in the case with Stoicism, however, there are no signs in the NT that this process was understood as a continuously periodic return of the cosmic cycle. Stoic views, this time on the destruction of the world by water and fire, again constitute the background of 2 Peter's interpretation of past and future history in terms of the destruction of the ancient world by water and the future destruction of the present world by fire (2:5; 3:4–7, 10–12), followed by what, drawing on Isaiah's terminology, is referred to as "new heavens and a new earth" (3:13; cf. Isa 65:17; 66:22). According to Paul, this new creation is already anticipated by those who are "in Christ": "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor 5:17; cf. Gal 6:14–15; Col 3:10; Eph 2:15; 4:24).

Bibliography: ■ Adams, E., *The Stars Will Fall from Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and Its World* (Library

of New Testament Studies 347; London 2007). ■ Cox, R., *By the Same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (BZNW 145; Berlin/New York 2007). ■ Sedley, D. N., *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity* (Sather Classical Lectures 66; Berkeley, Calif. 2007). ■ Sterling, G. E., "Prepositional Metaphysics in Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Early Christian Liturgical Texts," *Studia Philonica Annual* 9 (1997) 219–38. ■ Van Kooten, G. H., *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School* (WUNT 2/171; Tübingen 2003). ■ Van Kooten, G. H. (ed.), *The Creation of Heaven and Earth* (Themes in Biblical Narrative 8; Leiden/Boston, Mass. 2005).

George H. van Kooten

IV. Greco Roman Antiquity

In the oldest Greek traditions, cosmogony appears in the guise of theogony. Parts and powers of the world are, unless perennial, not made but engendered as divine persons. Some motifs hark back to the cosmologies of the ancient East. When Homer (*Il.* 14.201 and 246) calls Oceanus and Tethys "origin of all," we are reminded of the primeval water in Egypt and Babylonia. More controversial is the origin of Hesiod's "Chaos," which seems to mean a "dark gaping abyss." The elaborate theogonies of Hesiod and the Orphics have a two-phase structure: first the origin of primeval entities, then a dramatic, even violent conflict of world rulers, by which the present world order is established (succession myth in Hesiod: Uranus, Cronus, Zeus). This structure is comparable to the *Enuma Elish*.

With the Presocratics, de-mythologization begins. Mythological individuals are replaced by physical substances and the world-forming processes become purely mechanical. Characteristically, each posits a primeval substance (Gk. ἀρχή), out of which the complex structure of the world is derived: Thales water, Anaximenes air, Anaximander "the unlimited" (Gk. τὸ ἄπειρον), Heraclitus fire etc. The view of Thales is perhaps misrepresented by tradition, and he actually held the archaic view (similar to the Babylonians) that the earth floats on water. Even so, he replaced the mythical Oceanus with a purely material element. Heraclitus denies that the world is created and declares it to be perennial (Diels-Kranz 22B30). As a compromise, cyclical cosmogonies are construed, as does Empedocles. Empedocles also introduces impersonal powers as agents, "Love" and "Strife." Gradually, the notion becomes dominant that the world is admirably well-organized, and the word κόσμος is applied to it. As a consequence, a planning mind is postulated as its organizer; Anaxagoras calls him "Νοῦς." The opposite position is taken by Democritus, who sees "Necessity" as the world-forming agent.

This creative power described above is not easily integrated into polytheistic religion. Instead of simply calling it a god, the term δημιουργός "craftsman" emerges, a metaphor implying great respect for the creative achievements of a social class generally held in low esteem. The term is first attested in

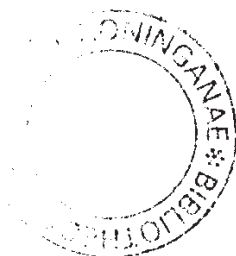
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BIBLE AND ITS RECEPTION

5

Charisma –
Czaczkes

De Gruyter
Berlin · Boston

Editorial team: Dr. Kristina Dronsch, Gary S. Helft, Stefanie Rabe



ISBN 978-3-11-018373-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2012 Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin/Boston

Illustrations in cooperation with akg-images Berlin, Germany

Cover design: Martin Zech, Bremen, Germany

Typesetting: Meta Systems Publishing- & Printservices GmbH, Wustermark, Germany

Printing and binding: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen, Germany

♻️ Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Germany

www.degruyter.com